

Red Hill, Dwelling
Patrick Henry National Memorial
Brookneal Vicinity
Charlotte County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1034-B

HABS
VA.
20-BROOK,
1-B-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RED HILL - DWELLING
(Patrick Henry National Memorial)

HABS No. VA-1034-B

Location: Approximately 1.1 miles south of State Route 619, 5.3 miles south^{east} ~~west~~ of Brookneal, in Charlotte County, Virginia.

Present Owner/Occupant: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation.

Significance: Red Hill was the final home and burial site of Patrick Henry (1736-99), prominent Revolutionary War and early national patriot, politician, orator, and lawyer. Henry was a leader in provoking and organizing resistance to British government of the colonies. He served as governor of Virginia five times in the 1770-80s, during the American Revolution and its aftermath, and led the opposition to ratifying the U.S. Constitution in Virginia in 1788. He thereafter withdrew from state politics and resumed a successful law practice. Henry occupied Red Hill from 1794 until 1799, the year of his death.

Red Hill is a 1950s interpretation of a typical well-to-do eighteenth-century planter's home in Southside Virginia, and includes the dwelling, detached law office and kitchen, privy, smokehouse, stables and carriage house, and slave cabin. The buildings have all been reconstructed, although part of the law office and other dependencies are purported to be original to Henry's tenure.

In 1978 the U.S. Department of the Interior recognized Red Hill as a national landmark and entered the property in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986 the property was designated a National Memorial to Patrick Henry by an act of Congress.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original Patrick Henry plantation was built at least by 1794; the much-altered and enlarged dwelling burned in February 1919. Reconstruction of the dwelling, kitchen, privy, and smokehouse, and restoration of the slave cabin and law office was completed in 1956. The wall surrounding the graveyard was erected in 1959, and the stables and carriage house were reconstructed in 1965.
2. Architect: Stanhope Johnson designed the reconstruction.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Patrick Henry purchased the property in 1794 from Richard Marot Booker. Upon Henry's death, it was left by will to his wife, Dorothea; and upon her death, in 1831, to Henry's son John (1796-1868). Upon John Henry's death, Red Hill was inherited by his son, William Wirt Henry (1831-1900), who owned it until his death in

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In 1900. In 1900 the estate was inherited jointly by his wife and children. In 1905 William Wirt Henry's daughter, Lucy Harrison, purchased the shares in the property held by the rest of her family, and she lived there until her death in 1944. Reconstruction of the dwelling and outbuildings was begun after the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation assumed ownership of the property in 1945. The National Park Service provides technical assistance to the foundation.

4. Builder, contractor suppliers: A.J. Arthur of Lynchburg, Virginia.
5. Original plans and construction: A copy of Stanhope Johnson's 1956 reconstruction plans are on file in the Red Hill archives. Most of the buildings at Red Hill date from the reconstruction. The law office, slave cabin, and a portion of the stables are believed to be of an older--although indeterminate--construction date and may incorporate original and historic building fabric.

Photographs in the Red Hill archives and in the photographic archives at the Valentine Museum, show the building and grounds after the 1907-11 renovations, and several photographs exist for the mid to late eighteenth century. Henry Howe's Historical Collections of Old Virginia contains a somewhat lyrical description of Red Hill and includes a drawing of the John Henry house as it existed ca. 1845. Otherwise, no reliable graphic evidence documenting any buildings on the site has been located for the years prior to 1912.

6. Alterations and additions: None.

- B. Historical Context: The Red Hill reconstruction was aimed at portraying the property as it would have appeared between 1794, when Henry purchased the estate, and 1799, when he died. During the final years of his life, Henry avoided public service, standing for office only once, shortly before he died (and only then amid a bitter political struggle between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, and at the personal request of former President George Washington). Henry's years at Red Hill were devoted to pursuing a legal practice, which also was usurped in his final years by the management responsibilities of several large tobacco plantations. Persistent legend, perpetuated by several early biographers, asserts that Henry retired from public life to devote time to his children. This may be true, although not in the sentimental sense of these early chroniclers. Henry's growing family by his second wife, Dorothea Dandridge, ultimately included six sons, and Henry actively sought to acquire sufficient property to establish each of them as a landed gentleman and planter.

The Red Hill property--so named for the red clay of the hilltop (Clark, 287)--is known to have changed ownership six times. Henry purchased the property from Richard Marot Booker in 1794. When Henry died 1799, the plantation passed to his wife, Dorothea, who owned it until her death in 1833. The property was then inherited by John Henry, Patrick Henry's youngest son,

according to the terms of his father's will. It is, however, likely that John Henry occupied the site prior to the death of his mother, since Dorothea Henry remarried in 1803 and moved to the estate of her new husband. With the death of John Henry in 1868, the property was inherited by his son, William Wirt Henry. William Wirt Henry died in 1900, and Red Hill was inherited by William Wirt Henry's wife and children, including Elizabeth Lyons; daughter Lucy Gray Harrison--absent from the will because her marriage left her quite wealthy--bought out these owners in 1905. She lived at Red Hill until her death in 1944, and a year later the property was acquired by the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation.

Building activity at Red Hill is poorly documented prior to the tenure of Lucy Gray Harrison. Howe, in his 1845 account of the property, portrays the dwelling when John Henry was in residence, and claims the more substantial portion of the house was added by him. This is substantiated by Henry biographer George Morgan, who visited Red Hill sometime prior to 1907 and interviewed a number of Patrick Henry's grandchildren and great grand-children. (It should be noted, however, that much of Morgan's brief description of Red Hill is taken from Howe.) Neither these early descriptions, nor the photographic record, contains any information about plantation structures other than the dwelling. One undated photograph shows the south facade of the house at this time.

The mid nineteenth-century John Henry house was composed of a two-story, three-bay side-hall plan with double gable-end chimneys and a shed-roofed brick addition on the west gable end. The east gable end was connected to a one-story, one-bay hyphen, which connected with the one and one half story wing that was Patrick Henry's dwelling. This unit is two bays long with a one-bay shed addition on the east gable end, which is tall enough to protrude beyond the roofline of the wing itself--as it does today; a chimney probably exists between the wing and addition (although this area is obscured by foliage in the view). The windows feature twelve-over-twelve-light, double-hung sash on the first floor of the main block and the wing; eight-over-twelve-light, double-hung sash on the second floor of the former and the hyphen. All windows feature louvered wood shutters.

At the same time, the elaborate boxwood plantings were already in place: on the south/front (river) side, two hemispherical forms are contained within an outer, encircling pattern of boxwood. The "luxuriant hedge of tree-box, about 4' high, pungent and aromatic, spreads across the front lawn in an unusual design and walls in the grass walks that lead to the house. It is emphasized that these are tree-box, clipped and kept short, instead of the dwarf-box generally used for this purpose." A large "scraggly, old locust tree" was situated in the east half; its counterpart was gone prior to 1905. Otherwise, the front lawn featured only a large cedar tree and a pear tree (Clark, 287).

The east wing/former Henry dwelling reportedly featured "high white mantels and a crooked, narrow, boxed-in stairway" (Clark, 288); the shed addition on the east gable end Henry constructed, according to dubious legend, because "he wished to hear the patter of the raindrops on its roof" (Morgan).

The documentary record improves somewhat after 1912. When Harrison acquired Red Hill in 1905, she began a series of additions that turned the Patrick

and John Henry House into an eighteen-room mansion. She employed Philadelphia architect Charles Barton Keen to design the enlargement and supervise the construction. Keen in turn employed as his assistant a young local architect, Stanhope S. Johnson, who surveyed the property and made detailed sketches of the existing house, including a portion that, according to Johnson, was the original Patrick Henry dwelling.

The added west hyphen and wing are identical with the original and east-end units, and the entrance portico with paired columnar supports is retained. It appears that the second-story window above the hall (in the mid-century block) was moved to the west, and three additional bays containing eight-over-twelve-light, double-hung sash were installed to create a six-bay second-story facade. The original Patrick Henry block and its hyphen was moved east to allow the introduction of two bays on the first floor and a gable-end set of double chimneys. The central block thus was transformed into a center-hall plan at the core of a five-part, symmetrical Georgian-revival composition.

A ca. 1907-12 site plan by Keen (see page 14) incorporates the earlier tree-box scheme into an expanded design. In addition to the hemispherical and circular layout of the shrubs, symmetrical armlike parterres extend and curve outward from the perimeter to terminate at matching, square-plan, pyramidal-roofed tea houses. (The origin of this layout is likely high-style eighteenth-century Virginia plantation schemes such as Mount Vernon and Mount Airy, wherein connectors such as these would have served as covered walkways linking the dwelling and dependencies.) A period photograph of the fully developed Lucy Harrison house does not show these arms or the tea houses, so it is uncertain whether or not they were constructed. According to the same Keen site plan, the rear facade of this house featured column-supported porches in front of the hyphen and part of the wing blocks. These met a walkway that paralleled the structure, terminating on the west with an ice house, and on the east with the burial ground. The "old cabin," here with an L-shaped plan, is located in the northwest corner of the site. On axis with the rear entry is a slightly skewed allée of tree-box that terminated at gate posts. A perpendicular line of box defines the east boundary of the dwelling "yard"; the area across this hedge contained formal and kitchen gardens, as well as the combined offices of Patrick Henry and William Wirt Henry. After fire destroyed the dwelling in February 1919, this "cottage" served as the residence.

Clark further describes the landscaping: "A bit to the east is the old garden where box-hedges separate colors and varieties of flowers and shrubs, some of which were brought originally from Mount Vernon," which is attributed to Elvira Henry. At the entrance to this garden were four trees that formed a bower; fig bushes and white violets flanked the gate. The walk along the rear of the house to the burial site was lined with "tea, hardy roses, calycanthus, spiraea, snowballs and other old-fashioned shrubs. The remainder of the ample garden is given over to vegetables" (Clark, 289).

The finished Harrison house is described in a Ladies Home Journal article of 1912. Building plans for the structure have not been located, but there are a number of detailed photographs (including some interior views) of the completed mansion in the Red Hill and Valentine Museum archives. The sketches Johnson

alleged made between 1907 and 1912 for Keen were supposedly the basis for Johnson's 1956-57 reconstruction. NPS researchers apparently had access to the sketches in 1962, but they have since disappeared.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The small reconstructed house is a Colonial Revival interpretation of what Henry's eighteenth-century dwelling may have looked like. It is a modest, one and one-half story frame structure with a steep gable roof, typical of early Virginia houses. The interior is arranged on a side-hall plan with shed and gabled additions at the east and west ends, respectively. The additions and interior features are not wholly authentic to the late eighteenth-century period of significance, but rather reflect a more romantic twentieth-century Colonial Revival taste.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one and one-half story rectangular house has a single-story, one-bay shed addition on the east gable end, and a single-story, one-bay side-gabled addition on the west gable end. The main block is 30'-0" x 19'-2"; the shed addition extends 12'-7" east of the main block, and is likewise 19'-2" deep; the west addition extends 12'-0" west of the main block, and is 16'-0" deep.
2. Foundation: Brick laid in Flemish-bond courses. Five courses of brick are exposed beneath the west addition and most of the main block, but the land drops off slightly to the east, and twelve courses are exposed beneath the shed addition. The foundations are vented by wood-frame, fixed-louver vents centered beneath the windows of the main block and western addition.
3. Walls: The walls are clad with lapped, beaded, horizontal weatherboards, each with approximately 4-3/8" of exposure and cornermolding.
4. Structural systems, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porch: The only porch is located on the east face of the shed addition. The porch measures 6'-4" x 7'-1", and rests on four cylindrical brick piers that support 8" x 8" wood posts. The sides of the porch below the deck feature latticework characteristic of twentieth-century styling. The porch deck consists of 3-1/4" tongue-and-groove floorboards. A wood stairway links the porch to the flagstone path located east of the house. The

stairway has seven steps, each with 11-3/4" treads and 7" risers. Both the stairway and porch feature a plain baluster. The rail supports are twentieth-century machine-turned spindles. The porch is roofed with wood shingles, lapped at the roof ridge. The porch pediment is clad to match the weatherboarding of the main house. Attached to the wall to the south of the doorway into the shed addition is a waist high, slightly angled wood shelf. Edith Poindexter, an interpreter at the site, believes this shelf would have been used as a convenient resting place by servants carrying platters of food in from the kitchen, but this is undocumented and seems doubtful.

6. Chimneys: The dwelling has two brick interior gable-end chimneys centered on the ridge line. One is located on the east end of the main block, near the juncture with the shed addition. The second is on the west facade of the west addition. Both are framed at the top by two courses of projecting brick.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways, doors: The dwelling has three entrances, one each on the north, east, and west facades. All three doors are wood, with six recessed panels. The entry on the north face of the dwelling is in the westernmost bay of the main block. It is fronted by three cut flagstone steps laid on rubble fill. The frame doorway is trimmed with molding and is surmounted by a transom and three lights. The east and west doorways are identical in frame and trim to the north doorway, but do not feature transoms. The latter is covered with modern storm-window glazing, held in place by metal brackets.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The dwelling has eight nine-over-nine-light double-hung wood sash on the first story; four each on the north and south facades. One each is located on the north and south facades of the east and west additions; two each are located in the northernmost two-thirds of the main block, on the north and south facades. All first floor windows have shutters. The second story has single four-light casement windows, two on the west gable end of the main block and two on the east end. All first-floor windows are flanked by louvered wood shutters with metal hardware.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gable roof of the main block is steeply pitched with the ridge oriented east to west. The west addition gable roof is a standard pitch. The east addition has a shed roof with a shallow cant. This unit is unusual in that it rises above the eave line of the main block about 2', and thus creates an awkward

intersection at the west gable end--though there is evidence that this is historically accurate. All roofs are covered with cedar shingles, lapped at the ridge.

- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are boxed, with shingle and bed molding.

C. Description of Interior:

1. First-floor plan: The original block is a hall-and-parlor plan with a stairway on the south wall of the former. Doors off the passage lead west into the west (chamber) addition and east into the parlor, a room that occupies two-thirds of the first-floor space of the main block. From the west parlor, a door leads east to the shed addition. Closets are located beneath the stairs in the hall, in the southeast corner of the main block, and in the northwest corner of the west addition.
2. Second-floor plan: Coming off the stairs, the second (or attic) story features a short passage leading to a bedroom that occupies about two-thirds of the east end of the space; a second, smaller chamber is located in the northwest corner of the building. A small closet opens onto the upstairs passage and the large bedroom features a decorative hearth.
3. Stairway: A single wood stairway rises to the west along the south wall of the hall. The stairs are narrow and steep, with 11-1/4" wide steps and 8-3/4" risers. The stairs pivot 180 degrees about a central wood post, and have wood rails and balusters. Chair rail molding extends along the perimeter of the stairwell.
4. Flooring: Wood boards.
5. Wall and ceiling finish: Ceilings are plaster. All wall areas above the dado paneling are covered with floral wallpaper. Plain crown molding is featured in the west addition. The shed addition, parlor, downstairs hall, and stairwell feature chair rail molding and paneling 26-1/2" high. First-floor rooms have 8-1/4" baseboards; upstairs rooms, 4-1/2" baseboards. In the hall, the area between the baseboards and the molding is paneled with three 4-1/2" horizontal wood boards. Elsewhere, this space is finished with plaster. Exposed corners created by the protrusion of the closet in the west addition and the protrusion of the fireplace in the upstairs chamber are protected by cornermolding, which rises approximately 5' from the floor.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Single, six-panel wood.

- b. Windows: All first-floor windows are fitted with wood-slat venetian blinds.
- 7. Decorative features and trim: The fireplaces mantels are carved wood, although the designs are not in keeping with the period of significance. The mantel in the shed addition features a carved flower over the hearth. The mantel of the upstairs fireplace features a carved wood design that resembles upright and inverted lowercase "i"s.
- 8. Hardware: The cast-iron and bronze hardware in the house was made by James Peterson and Sons of Philadelphia. Hardware consists of No. 1551 box locks and 9-1/4" H hinges on doors, door handles, casement fittings, and candle lanterns for the hall, passage, shed addition, and west addition. Cast-iron boot scrapers are located by each entrance. According to Clark, the original "massive brass locks on the doors" of the enlarged 1907-12 dwelling were received by Patrick Henry as a fee in a law suit (Clark, 288).
- 9. Mechanical equipment: The house has no plumbing or air-conditioning systems. Baseboard electric heaters are installed in the hall and shed addition.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The Patrick Henry dwelling is located at the crest of a hill overlooking the confluence of the Staunton and Falling rivers. The house faces north, with its rear facade to the river (although the facing of the building was reversed during the John Henry construction). A massive osage orange tree--reputed to be 300 to 350 years old and one of the oldest in the state--which the popular oral history tradition traces to Patrick Henry's tenure, is north of the house. Dependencies and the slave cabin are located southeast of the house, extending in a linear formation perpendicular to the dwelling. The walled burial ground and office are east and northeast, respectively, of the house; the well and stables-carriage house are to the west. The house, dependencies, and burial ground are linked by flagstone paths. The complex is surrounded by an eroding circular drive.

The dwelling and ancillary structures rest on 117 acres that extend south of the house about 1,500 feet to an easement for the Norfolk and Western Railroad. From the railroad easement to the river, and north and west of the house, are some 840 acres of land owned by the Patrick Henry Boys Plantation. The land south of the house to the river is cleared to provide a dramatic vista across the rivers to the hills of Halifax County; the surrounding land to the north, west, and east is a mature forest of mixed pine and hardwoods.

- 2. Historic landscape design: There are no accounts of the Red Hill landscape

prior to the late nineteenth century. A 1923 publication (Sale) recounts the setting during Harrison's tenure, with some reference to its appearance during the late nineteenth century.

The area immediately surrounding the house is cleared. The boxwood maze south of the house and a box-lined allee on the north (that was once on axis with the main entrance of the John Henry-era house) were planted by Elvira Henry, John Henry's wife, sometime after she and her husband assumed ownership of Red Hill. Remnants of terraces to the east of the dwelling and documentation of early twentieth-century gardens there indicate that this may also have been the site of Patrick Henry's eighteenth-century gardens.¹ A ravine-like garden composed of flowering bushes, groundcover and some trees is located northwest of the dwelling and probably dates to the late nineteenth century.

3. Outbuildings: The estate includes six primary outbuildings that are described in individual reports: Addendum to law office, VA-1034-A; kitchen, VA-1034-C; smokehouse, VA-1034-D; privy, VA-1034-E; stables and carriage house, VA-1034-F; and slave cabin, VA-1034-G. In addition to these buildings, there is an insubstantial wood shed located east of the kitchen and a well and well house located northwest of the dwelling. The walled burial ground situated east of the kitchen contains the graves of Patrick Henry, Dorothea Henry, John Henry, and John Henry's wife, as well as several other persons. There is a stone foundation behind the slave cabin that may have been the site of a privy. Two mounting stiles, one west of the path that leads to the Henry dwelling and one southeast of the law office, as well as a hitching post, are also located at the site. Historically, according to the archeological investigation, a mill was located east of these buildings, along a Falling River tributary; nothing remains of this structure.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural Drawings: Copies of Stanhope Johnson's 1956 blueprints for the reconstruction are in the Red Hill archives and the Stanhope Johnson Papers at the Jones Memorial Library in Lynchburg, which also contains working sketches of the reconstruction.
- B. Early Views: There are numerous post-reconstruction photographs of Red Hill in the on-site archives. Earlier views, also in the Red Hill collection, include those used in a 1936 NPS study of Red Hill, and some views from Johnson's personal collection. Of the post-1912 Harrison mansion, at least one photograph shows the dwelling in the late nineteenth century, before the Harrison additions.
A number of photographs in the Cooke Collection at the Valentine Museum

¹ Browning & Associates, "Archeological Reconnaissance Survey, Red Hill, Charlotte County, Virginia" (May 1989): 16-8. Browning does not identify his source for the origin of the boxwood, nor has any evidence been located to indicate its provenance.

show the finished Harrison mansion, including some interior views. Only a single photograph shows the site prior to the Harrison construction, and that is only of the main house. The Valentine Museum holdings also contain a series of newspaper articles that include photographs of the Red Hill reconstruction.

Henry Howe's Historical Collections of Old Virginia contains the earliest depiction of Red Hill presently available, including a drawing of the John Henry house as it existed ca. 1845, as well as a poetic description of the property.

- C. Interview by author, with site interpreter and longtime area resident Edith Poindexter, at Red Hill, July 1989.

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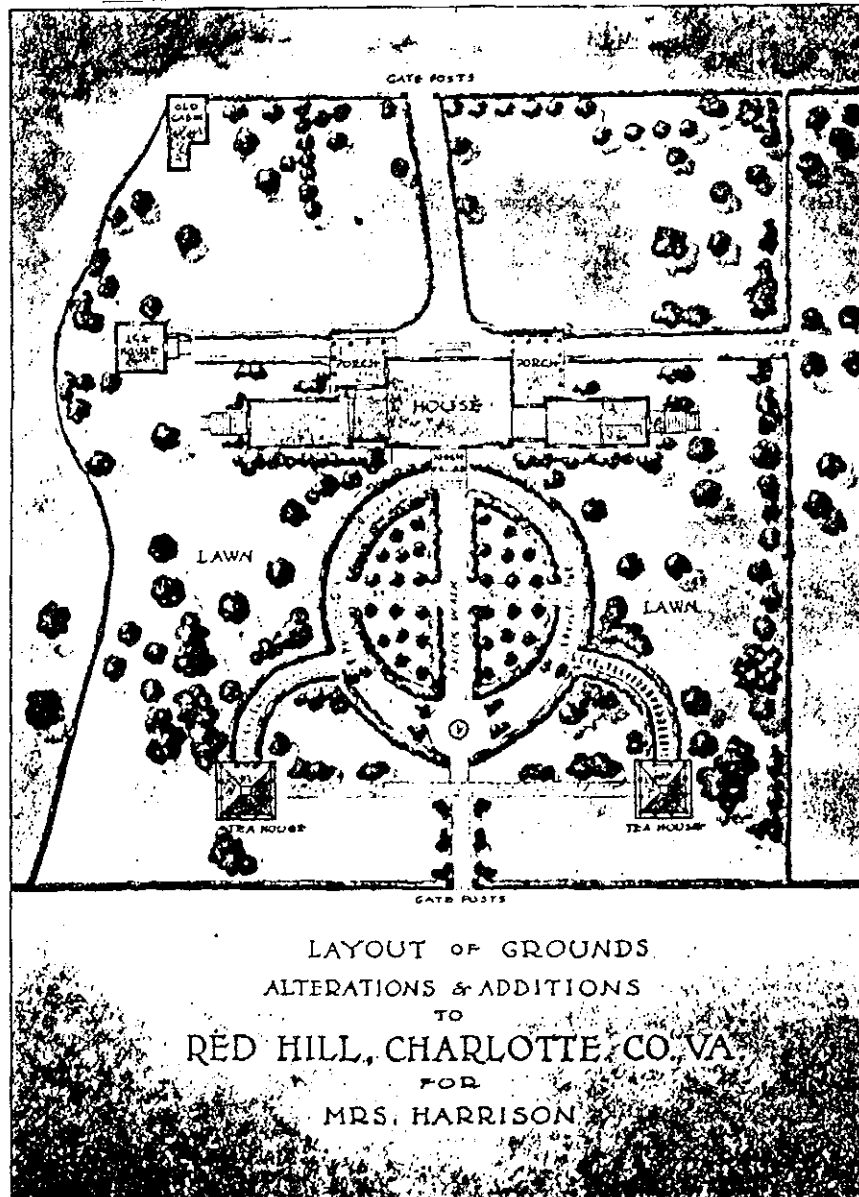
View of Red Hill, ca. 1845: John Henry occupancy, showing south/river facade of dwelling.

Undated photograph
Valentine Museum, Richmond



Site Plan of Red Hill, ca. 1907-12, by Charles Barton Keen.

From Historic Gardens of Virginia, Sale.



Charles Barton Keen

View of Red Hill, ca. 1907-12: Lucy Harrison occupancy,
showing south/river facade of dwelling.

Undated photograph
Valentine Museum, Richmond

